

Middle

# Lecture Title: Challenges of appointing teachers as middle leaders



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**Middle Leaders and the Leadership  
of Educational Institutions  
MQF Level 5, 4 ECTS**

# The Engine Room

- “This flexible role within the hierarchy of school life requires the individual to be adaptable, and to have the skills necessary to translate Senior Leadership visions into achievable processes. What's more, Middle Leadership in Schools, when used effectively and efficiently, provides unique insights into how things play out in the day-to-day actioning of those visions. In this sense, then, we can think of the middle leadership role as being the engine room of any school.” Robertson D (2020)



# The middle tier

- The term *middle leader* is often described as an overall title to describe a leadership position within a school that entails additional responsibilities to those of the classroom.
- The common theme running through most definitions of what the role entails, refers to the teachers as being the “middle layer”. Fitzgerald, (2004:2) referred to the teachers in this position as “the meat in the sandwich”.



# A collective responsibility

- There have been many studies on how to best improve school systems so that they become more effective. School leadership is recognised internationally as an important factor in improving school effectiveness, teacher quality and student achievement.
- According to Dinham et. al (2013) maximising leadership in schools is a collective responsibility. There is a growing conviction that the singular leadership of a principal is not sufficient for a complex organization like a school.
- Hargreaves and Fink (2006) maintain that the leadership of principals and assuming that school leadership is synonymous with the principal has featured in educational literature for far too long.



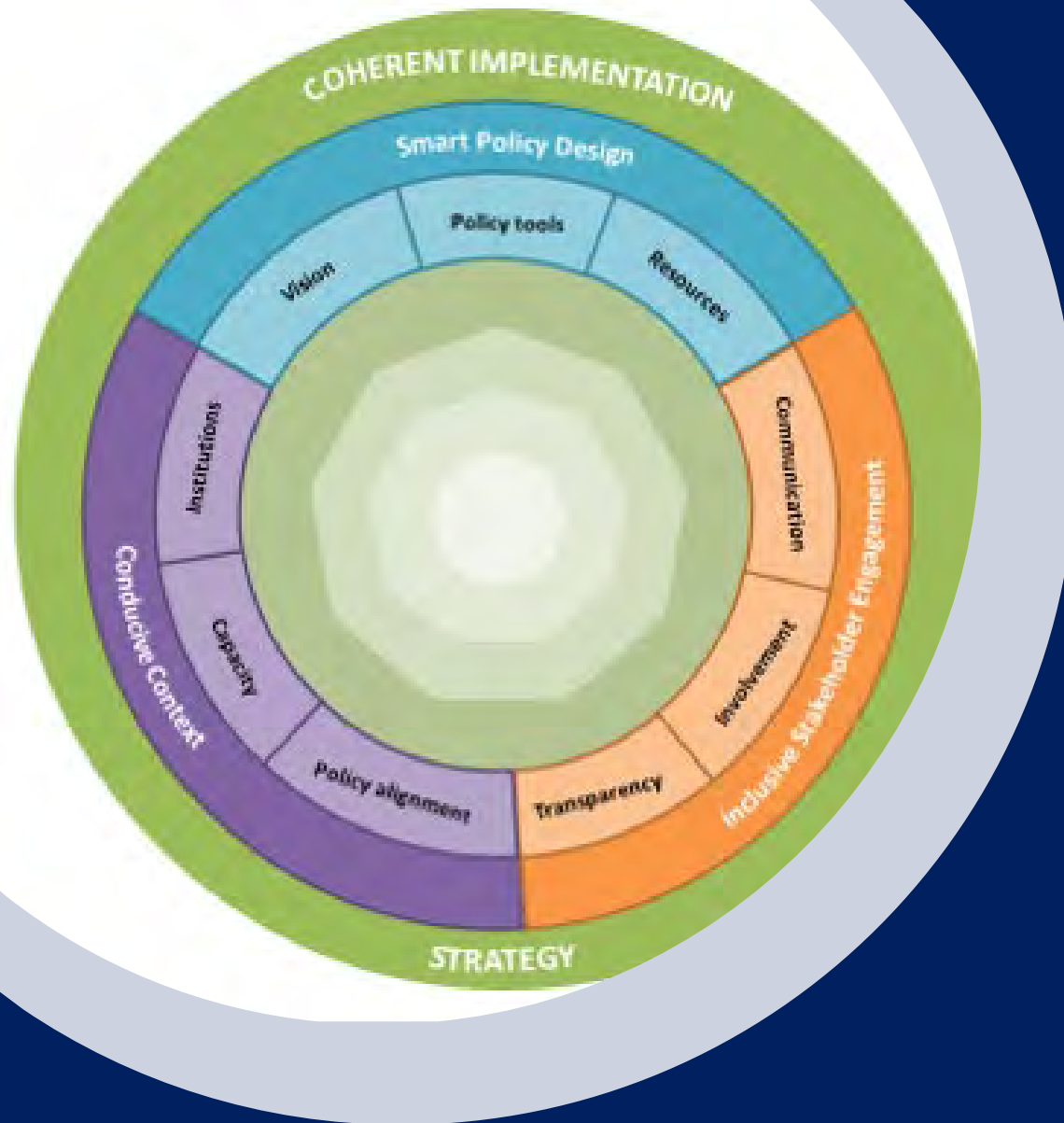
**LET'S  
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- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rc4NmHj3Fcl&ab\\_channel=EuropeanSchoolEducationPlatform](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rc4NmHj3Fcl&ab_channel=EuropeanSchoolEducationPlatform)

# Realizing the policies

According to Gurr and Drysdale, (2013) it usually is the senior leadership team who shape the school's ethos, set policies and establish guidelines, and the middle leaders, "...among them year heads, heads of subject departments, programme coordinators, and instructional coordinators work to apply and realize them."

Robinson & Aronica (2015) add that "when large-scale changes get under way, school middle leaders are increasingly the motivators and organizers of teachers while also serving as professional developers and mentors, working towards improving education outcomes."



## Formal roles and functions

- The Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL) draws upon Lynas' (2017) definition of middle leadership as follows:
- "Middle leadership relates to the kind of leadership functions and qualities demonstrated by those who, while modelling their own teaching skills, have formal leadership and line management responsibilities for a stage, departmental, pastoral or other team of colleagues within a school".



# Tensions of being both teacher and leader

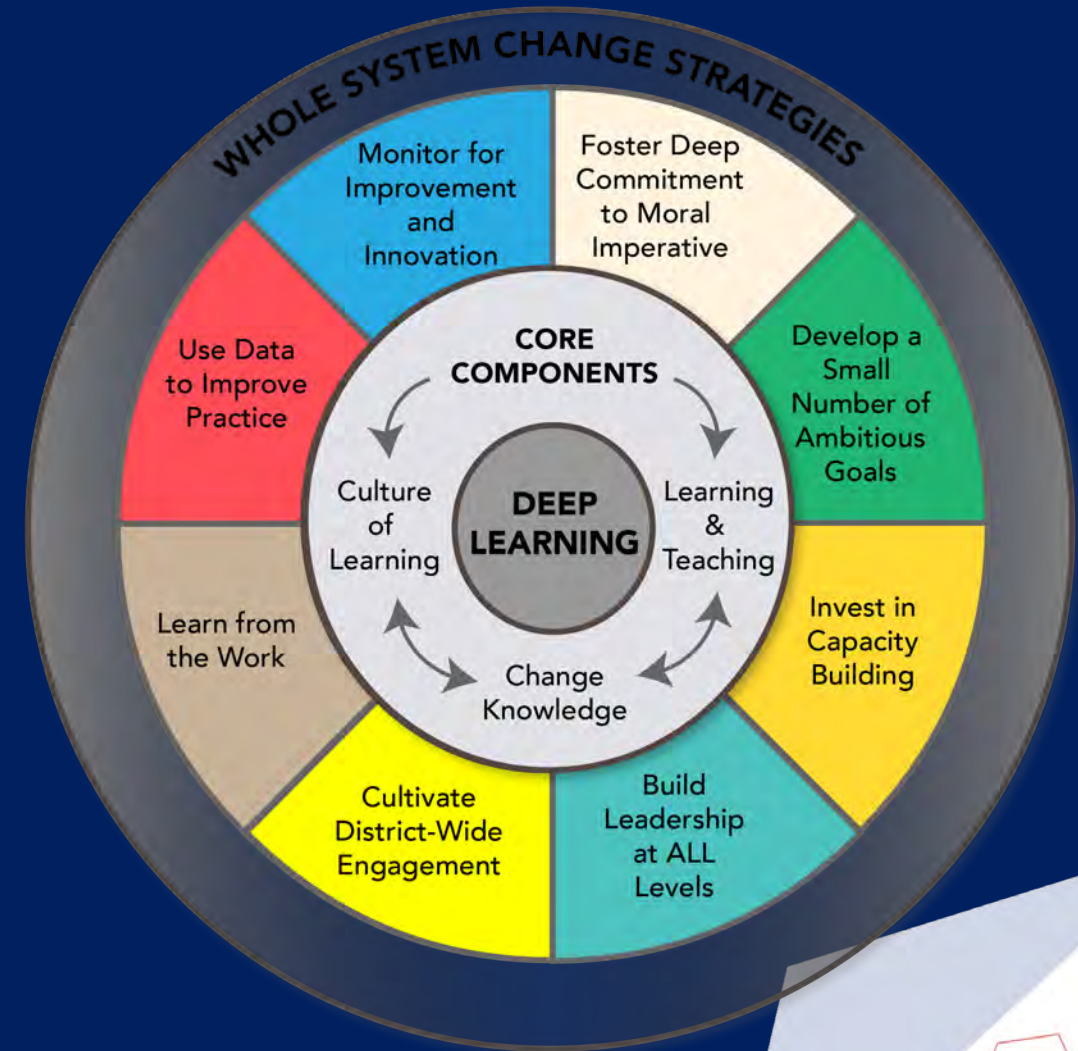
According to Timperly, H (2009) the middle leadership role often has tensions related to “boundary spanning” meaning having to deal with competing demands and expectations which can be conflicting. The role of being a middle leader though rewarding, can be challenging when meeting the demands of being both teacher and leader.

Transitioning from peer to leader of others in a time of changing policy can be particularly demanding for newly appointed middle leaders.



## Autonomy and Responsibility

- Harris & Jones (2012) also emphasise that the quality of middle leadership is heavily based on the amount of autonomy and responsibility they are entrusted with, to engage with teachers in supportive and innovative ways.
- Fullan (2010) shows that the middle leadership role in schools is particularly challenging as it attracts pressure from both the top and the bottom of the organisation. Therefore middle leaders in schools need specific forms of support and development to maximise their potential.



## Competing roles of middle leaders

As Andrew McCarthy 2020

<https://ajmccarthy.wordpress.com/2020/08/11/new-to-middle-leadership-welcome-to-the-balancing-act/> writes,

“A key challenge any middle leader faces is the constant switching of persona and emotions from both leading a team of front line teachers and then in turn following the lead of senior leaders.”

Moreover, he maintains that:

“This conundrum creates the classic squeeze in the middle hierarchy of schools which is frustrating and challenging for aspiring leaders. In one moment you are listening to personally comprehend a policy, strategy or dictum from above and yet in the next moment responsible to implement change with full confidence and bravado to your team. On occasions you might not even fully understand the rationale for a policy shift so are caught as both the carrier of news and the victim of change.”



Middle



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# Identifying the middle leaders

A body of research suggests that the middle leadership role is critical to raise the quality of an educational institution, Fink (2010), Rutherford and Boyle (2000) and Mercer and Ri,(2006). They argue that a school principal should reflect on the attributes of his/her members of staff to be able to identify those teachers who could be entrusted with a middle leadership position, Fink (2010)





# Appointing middle leaders

- In Malta, appointing middle leaders in state schools are prescribed by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education whilst in Church Schools, heads of school appoint middle leaders from within the pool of teachers within their organization.
- Church schools in Malta add a particular dimension to the role of middle leaders – since it is common practice to appoint senior leaders from within the middle leaders within each school , a system of enclosed succession according to Vella K (2015) Middle leadership progression in Maltese catholic schools a case study in enclosed succession. PhD thesis, University of Lincoln.

## Enclosed succession

- The practice of enclosed succession seems to have come about as a result of the tradition that heads have to be appointed from the Religious Order which provided the leadership of each school.
- This belief, that the best method of finding heads of Church Schools from within the organization seems to have transferred to the idea that the source of the school's principal would likely be selected from the school's middle leadership.

# Advantages and disadvantages of enclosed succession

- Appointing middle leaders from within the teachers employed at the same organization has both advantage as well as disadvantages.
- Loder and Spillane, (2005:2) maintain that middle leaders might feel comfortable in their new roles as middle leaders as they are familiar with their school system and ethos and thus, "can deal efficiently and possibly effectively with issues" that might arise.
- In contrast, they could also feel uneasy within their new role as previously they were teachers without a managerial role (ibid.2005)

## Finding middle leaders

From local literature about middle leaders, it seems that Maltese Church schools have been successful in finding teachers to hold such middle leadership posts Borg (1997).

According to Bezzina (2012) it seems that often middle leadership positions were offered as there was a high level of trust as well as a great sense of pride and belonging to the school they were serving in.

Vella K (2015:39) argues that the role of middle leaders is important and what they are enabled to do depend very much on the choices of their senior leaders.



## Appointing middle leaders

- Consequently maintains ibid (2015) that appointing middle leaders should be done with care, keeping in mind not only the current but also the future running of the school in the light that the role of the middle leaders was becoming more important as schools move more towards decentralisation Brown, Rutherford and Boyle, (2000).

A TEACHER LEADER  
Thinks Beyond The  
**Walls**  
Of Their Classroom  
To What Their  
**Impact**  
Can Be

## Preparing middle leaders

The preparation of middle leaders with the understanding of succession becomes an important and challenging task. Leaders are advised through texts to prepare their middle leaders and share with them the visions and expectations Wise, (2001) Crawford et.al, (1997)

Moreover in the U.K a number of institutions offer professional training to support potential or current leaders, Bennet, (1995) Earley (1990) and NCSL (2010) have suggested that middle leaders should work with members from the senior leadership team and with colleagues to get a wider view of the roles beyond the classroom.



## Senior leaders to inspire middle leaders

- Stoll et.al, (2003) and Fink, (2010) have outlined how vital it is for senior leaders to learn from others and to inspire their teachers in their daily routines and duties.
- It is essential that middle leaders are included in school development planning surmised Wallace and Hall (1994) as this involvement would ensure that school-wide policies are carried out at classroom level. NCSL, (2002).

# What are the qualities of a great leader?

Think back on those you consider as great leaders. What were their qualities?

How did they make you feel?

How did they inspire you?



## Middle leaders as agents of change

- It is implied that the role of “middle leader” in England is a “pivotal” role that contributes to bringing about change, NCSL, (2003) and are considered as vital for school improvement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century according to Jones and O’Sullivan (1997), Bush (2005) as middle managers are the ones that facilitate the implementation of initiatives.



## Middle leaders as an influential resource

- From the literature reviewed it appears that middle leaders seem to be regarded as the most significant and influential resource in any educational organization, and “it is a truism to say that appointing such people is the most important task” that a school head will ever undertake during their career Middlewood, (1997:23)that a school heads will ever undertake during their career.

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FIRING on all CYLINDERS  
'What makes an effective Middle Leader'

@ImpactWales

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TEAM & INTERPERSONAL

- Communication & diplomacy



- Open, consultative & collaborative



"The two most important personal characteristics of effective middle leaders are an ability to build strong relationships with team members, and being knowledgeable & able to implement that knowledge.. to achieve effective teaching and learning."

INFORMED & INFORMATIVE

- Bold, innovative & resourceful



- Professionally informed

ORGANISATION, PLANNING & RESOURCES



# Middle leaders need to be supported

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- Rhodes and Brundrett (2006) argue that middle leaders need to be supported by their senior leaders in their initiatives as their participation in the decision of their organizations leads to ongoing improvement.
- Brooks and Cavanagh (2007) also argue that principals should always take into consideration that middle leaders are the lynch pins that hold everything together for the schools to run better.



# Greater responsibilities diverted to the schools

The role of the middle leaders has also changed considerably over the past years and many more countries are entrusting greater responsibilities to the school, OECD (2009) and CEDEFOP (2011).

The many reforms and educational changes adopted in the last decade in England has increased the workload upon the senior leaders significantly, consequently more responsibilities have been distributed to middle leaders Glover and Gleeson (1997) Brown and Rutherford (1996) which duties were the direct remit of the senior leaders Brown et.al (2000).

Muijs et al. (2013) in their research have also found that middle leaders had a major formal and informal roles which included both management as well as pedagogical responsibilities.

Such responsibilities included teaching, learning and implementing the curriculum, monitoring and evaluating the work of colleagues as well as working on intrapersonal relationships and managing resources Adey (2000).

Moreover, according to Thomas Gregory (2014:620) middle leaders are also deemed to be “hybrid characters attempting to juggle multiple identities”.

# Formal and informal roles of middle leaders



## A creative force

- Briggs (2001) maintains that middle leaders in the UK occupy a strategic position due to their identity and so they are the “creative force” that bring organizational change.
- Thus, it is important that middle leaders are involved in school development planning. Including the middle leaders in the whole school policy approach in planning enabled the policy implementation at classroom level according to NCSL (2002).



## Time to work with and through people

- Studies that focused on the middle leaders have established that the duties of middle leaders vary according to the organization. Furthermore, in order for middle leaders to carry out their duties to the full, they need to have enough “time to work with and through people” according to White (2000).
- This in itself creates trust issues which need to be worked at by middle leaders to establish team work in ways, by which their peers do not feel threatened, but feel valued.

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## Training of middle leaders

- For this reason, it was ascertained that middle leaders need to receive adequate training to work and lead teams and be provided with the necessary resources besides being involved in the process of decision making Adey (2000).
- As already mentioned the challenge of appointing teachers to middle leaders is an important one. As institutions become more accountable the process of choosing middle leaders in preparation for future senior posts is not taken lightly. Wise (2009) and Crawford et al (1997) advise leaders to make their visions and expectations known.



# Middle Leaders and the Leadership of Educational Institutions



# Senior leaders as role models

- The NCSL in the UK provides professional training for future or current leaders. Stoll et al (2003) and Fink (2010) have outlined the importance for senior leaders to continuously inspire their teachers in their daily duties as well as to be willing to learn from others.
- Bezzina and Michalak (2006) maintain that heads should be willing to have trust in the ability of their middle leaders and support them to do a good job.



# Entrusting processes

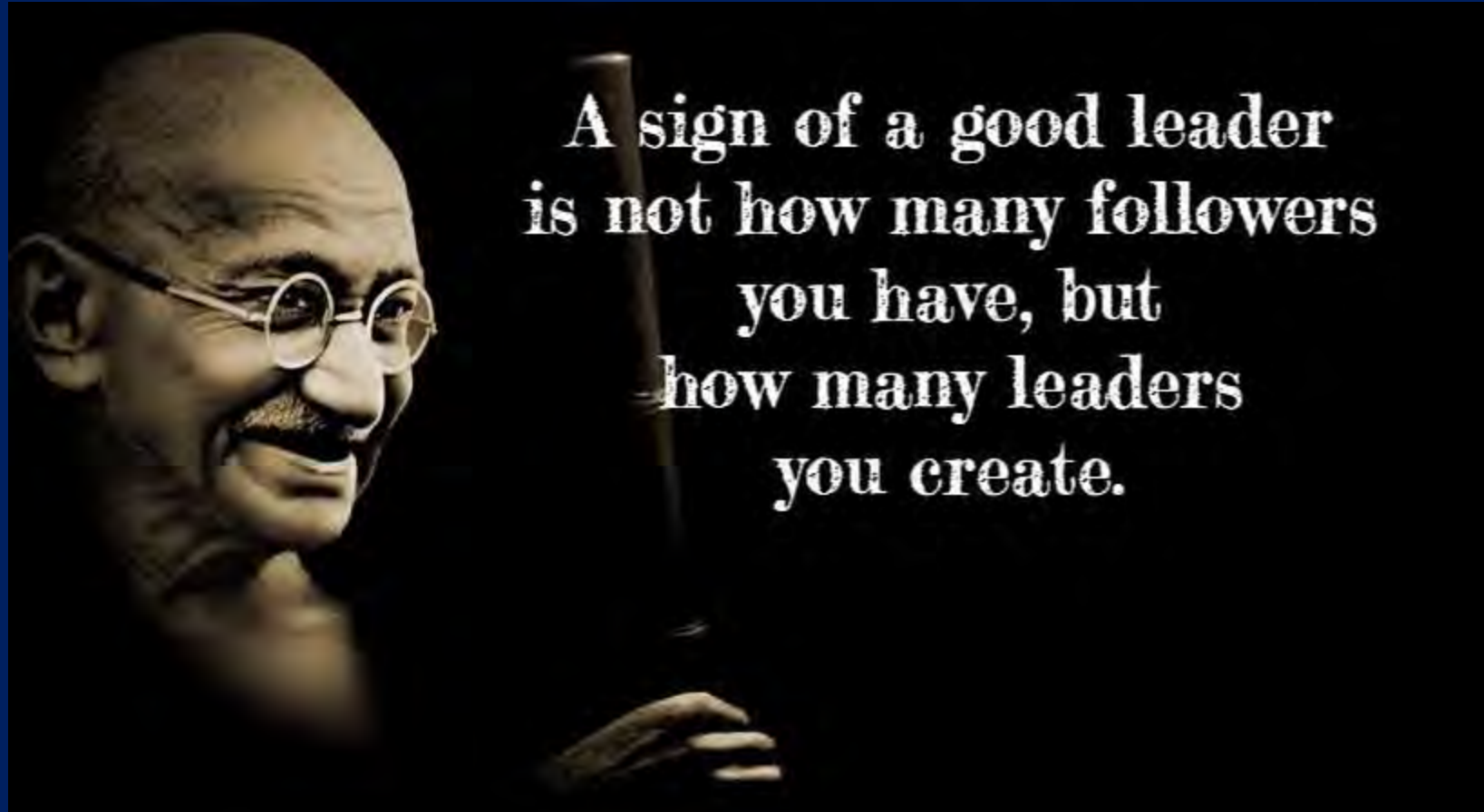
In the Maltese context, it has been established that school leaders were still finding it challenging to let go of processes that were previously in their remit according to Bezzina (2014).

Lumbey, (1999) Lin, Xie Jeng and Wang (2010) also maintain that school principals should value and appreciate the work of their middle leaders, as these in turn would be encouraged to work more enthusiastically and view their current position more positively.

## Future senior leaders

- This situation to “give power away” can be quite challenging for school leaders maintain Bezzina and Michalak (2006:46). When referring to the vital role of middle leaders Borg (1997) outlined how critical the role of a head of school is as a role model. Borg also sustains that middle leaders who take on these positions of responsibility might have the aim to become future leaders in their own school. *ibid* (1997).





## Guiding definitions

Consider the following definitions of leadership. Identify key words and discuss how appropriate they are to the role of a school leader.

Leadership is “a social process...attributed to those who are seen to influence others in ways that advance the group or organisation’s progress toward its goals” (Katz & Kahn 1996)

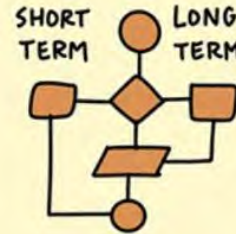
At the core of most definitions of leadership are two functions: “providing direction” and “exercising influence.” (Leithwood et al, *How leadership influences student learning* (2004:20)

"Leadership is a social influence process guided by a moral purpose with the aim of building capacity by optimising available resources towards the achievement of shared goals." (Dimmock, C., *Leadership, Capacity Building and School Improvement: concepts themes and impact* 2012, Routledge).

# Nine Roles of Great Leadership



ARCHITECT



PLANNER



EXECUTOR



CONDUCTOR

INSPIRE POSSIBILITIES



TEACHER



STEWARD



INNOVATOR



EXPERT



THINKER

## Middle Leaders and the Leadership of Educational Institutions



# LEADERS WITH INFLUENCE

**GIVE** WHEN THEY DON'T HAVE TO.

**CARE** FOR OTHERS.

**GROW** CONTINUOUSLY.

**LIVE** AUTHENTICALLY.

**EMPOWER** OTHERS.

**MANAGE** HARDSHIP.

**SERVE** WITH HUMILITY.



# Distributed leadership

- Distributed leadership enhances relationships between teachers and augments their confidence in teaching argue Greenleaf (1996) and Mac Beath (1998).
- Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009:32) suggest that when teachers see themselves as leaders they discover the potential to influence student learning and this leads to “professional efficacy”.
- Liebermann and Miller (2000:90) argue that teacher leadership is a “powerful way to make our schools work for everyone in them- the students and their teachers”.



## The leader creates the right environment

- Gronn (2000) believes that it is the interaction of the staff members that encourages distributed leadership whereas Hopkins and Jackson (2003) maintain that it is the leader who will create the right environment.
- The teaching profession has been described as “flat” in the literature argue Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009:32). They maintain that if teacher leaders were to have more “collaborative interactions” these would lead to a greater job satisfaction and the retaining of “outstanding teachers”. It would also open up the opportunity to expand the teachers’ careers “horizontally” and not only upwards into school administration.



# What motivates teachers become leaders?

Research shows that intellectual and professional growth as well as a decreased sense of isolation is among the motivators that encourage teachers to become leaders, Boyd-Dimock and Mc Gree (1995).

They maintain that teachers become leaders because they want to improve the quality of teaching and learning for their students.

Warren Little (1998) also argue that a sense of belonging and motivation increases if teachers are involved in the decision making process.

## Being proactive

Schwarzer and Schmitz (2004) claim that when teachers were “proactive” and took charge beyond their classes – their self efficacy increased, diminishing teacher burn –out.

Sergiovanni (1995:49) maintains that due to “undermanned setting” in small schools where there are not enough people to fit all the available leadership roles, a lot “more is asked of everyone”.



Middle Leaders and the Leadership of  
Educational Institutions

# Middle Leaders and the Leadership of Educational Institutions

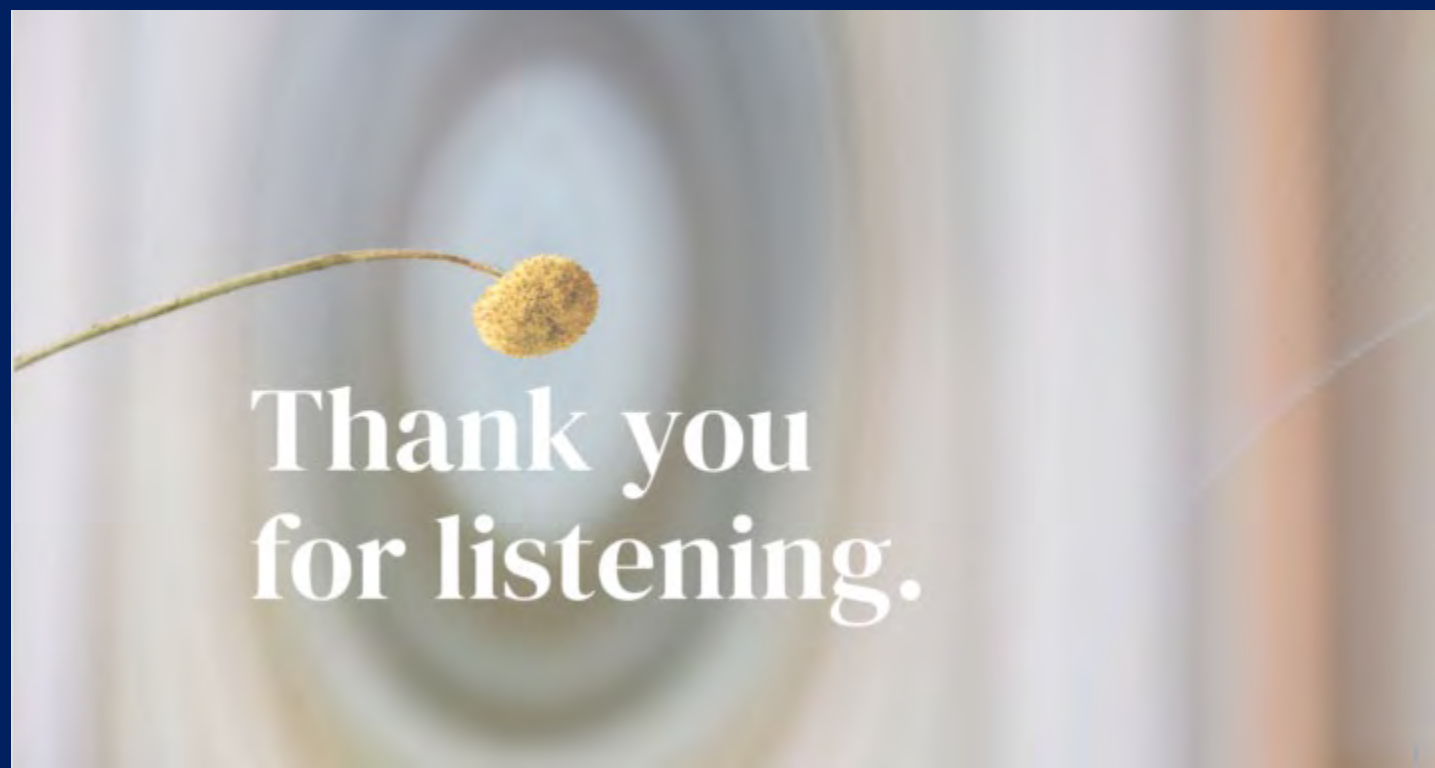
Click to watch video

[School Leadership: Leaders influence others \(thinkib.net\)](http://thinkib.net)



What stuck with you today?





# Middle Leaders and the Leadership of Educational Institutions

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- Characteristics of a middle leader - idea for a breakout room discussion
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIXsBF5MMUA&ab\\_channel=Ni  
allBrennan](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIXsBF5MMUA&ab_channel=Ni%20allBrennan)
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